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Ms. Cynthia T. Brown
Chief, Section of Administration
Office of Proceedings
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, D. C. 20423

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
January 12, 2015
Part of
Public Record

Re: Docket No. AB 1068 (Sub-No. 3X) Missouri Central Railroad Company—Abandonment and Discontinuance of Service Exemption—in Cass, Pettis, Benton, Morgan, Miller, Cole, Osage, Maries, Gasconade, and Franklin Counties, Missouri; and Docket No. AB 1070 (Sub-No. 3X) Central Midland Railway Company—Discontinuance of Service and Operating Rights Exemption—in Cass, Pettis, Benton, Morgan, Miller, Cole, Osage, Maries, Gasconade, and Franklin Counties, Missouri

Dear Ms. Brown:

I am writing on behalf of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), the nation's leading advocate for converting unused rail-trails into vibrant public spaces and active recreational trails, to support the December 16, 2014 request by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MoDNR), to which the Missouri Central Railroad Company (MCRR) has consented, that the Surface Transportation Board (STB) issue a Notice of Interim Trail Use (NITU) under the National Trails System Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1247(d) (Trails Act). Issuance of the NITU will allow MoDNR and MCRR to proceed with the railbanking of the Missouri Rock Island Line corridor, a 144.3-mile railroad corridor, which stretches from Windsor to Beaufort. This corridor has the potential to become a valuable asset to Missouri residents and visitors alike. RTC supports the MoDNR's efforts to convert this corridor into the Missouri Rock Island Trail for public use. RTC also opposes the Missouri Farm Bureau's request for a stay of STB's consideration of the railbanking request.

This Missouri Rock Island Line corridor offers an ideal opportunity for conversion into a trail. This particular corridor constitutes approximately 2/3 of the full Rock Island Line that stretches across Missouri between St. Louis and Kansas City. This stretch has not been used as an active railroad since the 1980's. If this full stretch were converted into a recreational trail, it would intersect with the Katy Trail and become part an interconnected statewide trail network of over 450 miles. By issuing a NITU now, the STB would preserve the integrity of the railroad corridor, allowing it to be reused for rail service in the future and ensuring the continued transportation use of the corridor for generations to come.

Preserving this corridor intact and allowing its use as a trail would benefit all Missourians. The potential economic benefit of the trail has already been demonstrated by the Katy Trail, which,



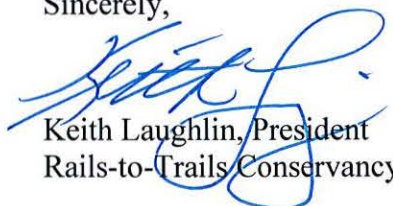
according to a 2012 Missouri State Parks report, brings 400,000 visitors every year and a total economic impact of over \$18 million, supporting 367 jobs.¹ If a trail is established along the entire Rock Island Line right-of-way in Missouri, it and the Katy Trail would together form one of the largest recreational trail loops in the world between St. Louis and Kansas City, attracting visitors from around the globe. Communities along the Missouri Rock Island Line have long recognized the potential for tourism and economic development that a trail would bring, and have been working towards this goal since the 1980s. In fall 2014, over 12,500 Missourians signed a petition to Missouri State Parks asking that the state railbank the corridor and convert it into a trail.

On December 17, 2014, the Missouri Farm Bureau (MoFB or Bureau) submitted a letter requesting a stay of this Board's consideration of the request by Missouri DNR for a NITU and public use condition, in order to allow this Board to "conduct public hearings at locations along the rail corridor for the purpose of promoting transparency by providing an opportunity for those most directly affected to learn firsthand about this proceeding and have their views heard by representatives of the government agency that is conducting this proceeding."

There is no statutory or regulatory support for staying the issuance of the NITU in order to undertake the proceedings and consider the issues identified by the Bureau. This Board's statutory role under the Trails Act is largely ministerial, and the objections to the NITU raised by the MoFB are beyond this Board's purview. *See Goos v. ICC*, 911 F.2d 1283 (8th Cir. 1990). Moreover, the requested proceedings are wholly unnecessary as the Missouri DNR has already stated its intention to hold public hearings about the Missouri Rock Island Trail, during which members of the public will have the opportunity to pose questions and obtain more information about the trail project and its potential benefits and impacts.

Accordingly, RTC requests that the STB deny the request for a stay and issue the requested NITU. RTC asks that the requested NITU be issued promptly to enable MoDNR and MCRR to proceed with negotiations for acquisition, conversion and preservation of this corridor. Once this is resolved, it will provide Missouri residents and visitors an important and historical recreational asset that will endure through the centuries.

Sincerely,


Keith Laughlin, President
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

¹ Synergy Group, Pragmatic Research, Inc. and James Pona Associations, "Katy Trail Economic Impact Report," July 30, 2012, available at http://mostateparks.com/sites/default/files/Katy_Trail_Economic_Impact_Report_Final.pdf.

I hereby certify that I have this day, January 9, 2015, served copies of the foregoing document upon all parties of record in this proceeding by first-class mail, postage pre-paid:

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